A GENTLEMAN FROM MISSISSIPPI

By THOMAS A. WISE

Novelized From the Play by Frederick R. Toombs

Here is a story of an epoch making battle of right against wrong, of honesty against corruption, of simplicity and sincerity against deceit, bribery and intrigue. It is the story of today in this country. It vitally concerns every man, woman and child in the United States, so far-reaching is its influence.

The warfare is now going on—the warfare of honest men against corrupt political machines.

The story tells the "inside" of the political manœuvers in Washington and of the workings of bosses there and elsewhere—how they shape men and women to their ends, how their cunning intrigues extend into the very social life of the nation's capital. You will find inspiration in the career of the honest old southern planter elected to the United States senate and the young newspaper reporter who becomes his private secretary and political pilot. Your heart will beat in sympathy with the love of the secretary and the senator's youngest daughter.

You will read of the lobbyists and find that not all of them are men. You will see how avarice causes a daughter to conspire against her father. You will hear the note of a gripping national tragedy in the words of Peabody, the "boss of the senate." But cause for laughter as well will not be found lacking in this truly many sided narrative.

CHAPTER I.

PRACTICAL POLITICS.

That bids him flout the law he makes;
That bids him make the law he flouts.
—Kipling.

IN buoyant spirit the Hon. Charles Norton rode up the bridle path leading through the Langdon plantation to the old antebellum homestead which, on a shaded knoll, overlooked the winding waters of the Pearl river. No finer prospect was to be had in all Mississippi than greeted the eye from the wide southwest porch, where on warm evenings the Langdons and their frequent guests gathered to dine or to watch the golden splendor of the dying sun.

The Langdon family had long been a power in the south. Its sons fought under Andrew Jackson at New Orleans, under Zachary Taylor in the war with Mexico, and in the civil war men of that name left their blood on the fields of Antietam, Shiloh, the Wilderness and Gettysburg. But this family of fighting men, of unselfish patriots, had also marked influence in the ways of peace, as real patriots should. Generations of Langdons had taken deepest pride in developing the hundreds of acres of cotton land, whose thousands of four foot rows planted each April spread open the

Hon. Charles Norton, M. C.

silvery lined bolls in July and August, and the ripened cotton fiber, pure white beneath the sun, gave from a distance the picture of an expanse of driven snow.

The Hon. Charles Norton had reason for feeling well pleased with the world as he fastened his bay Virginia hunter to a convenient post and strode up the steps of the mansion, which was a characteristic survivor of the "old south," the south of gilded romance and of gripping tragedy. Now in this second year of his first term as congressman and a promising member of the younger set of southern lawyers, he had just taken active part in securing the election of Colonel William H. Langdon, present head of the family, to the United States senate, though the ultimate action of the legislature had been really brought 'about by a lifelong friend of Colonel Langdon, the senior senator from the state, James Stevens, who had not hesitated to flatter Norton and use him as a cat's paw. This use the Hon. Charles Norton seemed to consider an honor of large propositions. Not every first term congressman can hope for intimacy with a senator. Norton believed that his work for Langdon would win him the family's gratitude and thus further his ambition to marry Carolina, the planter's oldest daughter, whose beauty made her the recipient of many attentions.

A complacent gleam shone in Norton's eyes as they swept over the fertile acres of the plantation. He thought of the material interest he might one day have in them if his suit for the hand of Carolina progressed favorably. Suddenly his reverie was interrupted by the voice of young Randolph Langdon, a spirited lad in his early twenties, who had just been made plantation manager by his father.

"Well, how is the honorable today?" said Randolph, approaching from the doorway. "I didn't think a congressman could be spared from Washington but rarely, especially when the papers say the country needs such a lot of saving."

"Oh, this 'saving your country' talk goes all right in the story books," replied Norton, who exercised considerable influence over the youth through a long acquaintanceship and by frequently taking him into his confidence, "but this country can take pretty good care of itself. In congress we representatives put the job of saving it over on the senate, and the senate hands back the job to us. So what's everybody's business isn't anybody's, a fine scheme so long as we have a president who keeps his hands off and doesn't"—

"The senate hands back the job."

"But how about the speeches and the bills?" broke in Randolph. "I thought"—

"Yes, yes; to be sure," the congressman quickly added. "Nearly all of us introduce these so called reform bills. When they're printed at government expense we send copies, carried free by the postoffice department, to our constituents, and when we allow the bills to die in some committee we can always blame the committee. But if there's a big fight by our constituents over the bill we let it pass the house, but arrange to kill it in the senate. Then we do the same thing for the senators. Like in every other business, my boy," continued Norton as he led the way into the house, "it's a case of 'you tickle me and I'll tickle you' in politics. And don't let any one fool you about the speeches either. They are pretty things to mail to the voters, but all the wise boys in Washington know they aren't meant seriously. It's all play acting, and there are better actors in the senate than Henry Irving or Edwin Booth ever were."

"I don't think my father looks at things the way you do, Charlie."

"No? Well, maybe he doesn't now, but he will later on when he takes his seat in the senate. If he isn't wise enough to play around with the rest of the senators he won't get any bills passed, especially any bill carrying an appropriation or of any other particular importance."

"What!" ejaculated the planter's son. "Do you mean to say that if father won't do what the other senators want him to do they will combine against him and destroy his usefulness, make him powerless—a failure?"

The congressman smiled patronizingly on the youth. "Why, of course they will. That's politics, practical politics, the only kind that's known in Washington. You see"—

"But the leaders of the great parties!" cried the young plantation manager in amazement. "Why don't they prevent this?"

"Because they invented the system and because political party differences don't amount to a whole lot much of the time in Washington. The politicians do most of their criticising of the other party away from Washington, where the voters can hear them. But when circumstances sometimes force a man to rise to assail the other side in congress he afterward apologizes in secret for his words. Or sometimes he apologizes beforehand, saying: 'I've got to hand out some hot shot to you fellows just to please a crowd of sovereign voters from my district who have come up to Washington to see me perform. So, of course, I've got to make a showing. Don't mind what I say. You know I don't mean it, but the old fogies will go back home and tell their neighbors what a rip snortin' reformer I be.'"

"Is that the way you represent your district, Norton?" asked Planter Langdon, who at this juncture entered the room.

"No, no, Mr. Langdon—I should say senator now, I suppose. I was merely telling Randolph how some legislators conduct themselves."

The senator elect paused momentarily, gazing at the congressman, who, dark visaged, tall, black haired, broad shouldered and athletic, was visibly uneasy at having his conversation with Randolph overheard by the father.

"No doubt it won't be all plain sailing in Washington for an old fashioned man like me, but I believe in the American people and the men they send to congress," slowly spoke the planter. "There's Senator Stevens, for instance. He has always stood for the rights of the people. I've read all his speeches. Just why he brought about my election it is hard to tell, for I've been a planter all my life except when I fought under Beauregard. I feel that he did it out of friendship, and I simply can't say how much I appreciate the honor. I am indebted to you, too, congressman."

Tactfully disclaiming any credit for his work, only Norton's congressional training in repression enabled him to refrain from smiling at Langdon's innocence, his belief in Stevens' sincerity and his wonder over his election. most folks don't know this because their own virtues pop up and blind 'em when they look at somebody else."

At the reunions of his old war comrades Langdon was always depended on to describe once again how the Third Mississippi charged at Crawfordsville and defeated the Eighth Illinois. But the stirring events of the past had served to increase the planter's fondness for his home life and his children, whose mother had died years before. At times he regretted that his unexpected political duties would take him away from the old plantation even though the enthusiastic approval of Carolina and Hope Georgia proved considerable compensation.

Although not sworn in as senator, Colonel Langdon's political duties were already pressing. A few days after Congressman Norton's visit he sat in his library conferring with several prominent citizens of his county regarding a plan to ask congress to appropriate money to dredge a portion of the channel of the Pearl river, which would greatly aid a large section of the state.

During the deliberations the name of Martin Sanders was announced by Jackson, the colonel's gravely decorous negro bodyguard, who bonsted that he "wuz brung up by Cunel Marse Langdon, suh, a fightin' Mississippi cunel, suh, sence long befo' de wah and way befo' dat, suh."

"Show Mr. Sanders right in," commanded Colonel Langdon.

"Good day, senator," spoke Sanders, the boss of seven counties, as he entered. Glancing around the room, he continued, bending toward the colonel and muffling his now whispering voice with his hand: "I want to speak to you alone. I'm here on politics."

"That's all right, but these gentlemen here are my friends and constituents," was the reply in no uncertain voice. "When I talk politics they have a perfect right to hear what I, as their senator, say. Out with it, Mr. Sanders."

As Sanders was introduced to the members of the conference he grew red in the face and stared at Langdon amazed. At last he had discovered something new in politics. "Say," he finally blurted, "when I talk business I"—

"Are you in politics as a business?" quickly spoke Colonel Langdon.

"Why—I—er—no, of course not," the visitor stammered. "I am in politics

Carolina Langdon had an austere loveliness

for my party's sake, just like everybody else," and Sanders grinned suggestively at his questioner.

"Have you anything further to say?" asked Langdon in a tone hinting that he would like to be rid of his caller.

"Well, since you are so very new in this game, senator, I'll talk right out in meetin', as they call it. I came to ask about an appointment an' to tip you off on a couple o' propositions. I want Jim Hagley taken care of—you've heard of Jim—was clerk o' Fenimore county. A $2,000 a year job 'll do for him; $500 o' that he gives to the organization."

"You're the organization, aren't you?" queried Langdon.

"Why, yes. Are you just gettin' wise?" cried Sanders. "Haven't I got fellers, voters, VOTERS, VOTERS, d—it, hangin' on to me that needs to be taken care of! An' so I make the fellers that work help those that don't. Why, Langdon, what 'n h— are you kickin' an' questionin' about? Didn't you get my twelve votes in the legislature? Did you have a chance for senator without 'em? Answer me that, will you? Why, with 'em you only had two more than needed to elect, an' the opposition crowd was solid for Wilson," cried the angry boss, pounding the long table before which Langdon sat.

"I'll answer you almighty quick," retorted the now thoroughly aroused senator elect, rising and shaking his clinched fist at Sanders. "Those twelve votes you 'say were yours—yours?"

"Yes, mine. Them noble legislators that cast 'em was an' is mine, mine, I tell you, jest like I had 'em in my pocket, an' that's where I mostly carry 'em, so as they won't go strayin' aroun' careless-like."

"Them noble legislators was mine."

"You didn't have to vote those men for me. I told you at the capitol that I would not make you or anybody else any promises. You voted them for me of your own accord. That's my answer."

At this point the gentlemen of the county present when Sanders entered and who had no desire to witness further the unpleasant episode rose to leave, in spite of the urgent request of Colonel Langdon that they remain. The only one reluctant to go was Deacon Amos Smallwood, who, coming to the plantation to seek employment for his son, had not been denied of his desire to join the assemblage of his neighbors.

Last to move toward the door, he stopped in front of Sanders, stretched his five feet three inches of stature on tiptoe and shook a withered fist in the boss' firmly set, determined face.

"Infamous!" shrieked the deacon. "You're a monster! You're unrighteous! You should have belonged to the political machine of Cataline or Pontius Pilate!"

"Never heard tell o' them," muttered Sanders, deeply puzzled. "Guess they was never in Mississippi in my time."

His accompanying gesture of perplexity caused the deacon to hasten his exit. Tripping over the leg of a chair, he fell headlong into the arms of the watchful Jackson, who received the deacon's blessing for "uplifting the righteous in the hour of their fall."

Relieved at the departure of the witnesses, Sanders showed increased aggressiveness. "To be sure, senator, you were careful not to personally promise me anything for my support at the election, as you say," the leader sneered, "but you had Jim Stevens to make promises for you, which was smooth, absolute an' artistic smooth"—

"Stop, sir!" Langdon furiously shouted. "You forget, sir, that your insinuation is an insult to a man elected senator from Mississippi, an insult to my state and to my friend Senator Stevens, who I know would make you no promises for me, for he had not my authority."

"Certainly you're a senator, but what's a senator anyhow? I'll tell you, Mr. Colonel Langdon, a senator is a man who holds out for his own pocket as much as us fellows that make him will stand for. When we don't get our rightful share, he's through."

With a sudden start, as though to spring at Sanders' throat, Langdon, with compressed lips and eyes blazing, grasped the edge of the table with a grip that threatened to rend the polished boards. With intensest effort he slowly regained control of himself. His fury had actually weakened him. His knees shook, and he sank weakly into a chair. When he finally spoke his voice was strained and laborious. "Sanders, you and I, sir, must never meet again because I might not succeed again in keeping my hands off you. What would my old comrades of the Third Mississippi say if they saw me sitting here and you there with a whole body, sir, after what you have said? They would not believe their eyes, thank God, sir. They would all go over to Stuart City and buy new eyeglasses, sir." A suspicious moisture appeared on the colonel's cheeks which he could not dry too quickly to escape Sanders' observation.

"But I had to let you stay, sir, because you, the sole accuser, are the only one who can tell me what I must know."

"What do you want to know?" asked Sanders, who had realized his great mistake in losing his temper, in talking as openly and as violently as he had and in dragging the name of Senator Stevens into the controversy. He must try to keep Stevens from hearing of this day's blunder, for Jim Stevens knew as well as he, didn't he, that the man who loses his temper, like the man who talks too much, is of no use in politics.

"I want to know how you formed your opinion of political matters—of senators. Is it possible, sir, that you have actual knowledge of actual happenings that give you the right to talk as you have? I want to know if I must feel shame, feel disgrace, sir, to be a senator from Mississippi, that state, sir, that the Almighty himself, sir, would choose to live in if he came to earth."

"There, there, senator, don't take too seriously what I have said," Sanders replied in reassuring tone, having outlined his course of action. "I lost my head because you wouldn't promise me something I needed—that appointment for Hagley. What I said about senators an' such was all wild words—nothin' in 'em. Why, how could there be, senator?" This query was a happy afterthought which Sanders craftily suggested in a designedly artless manner.

"Just what I thought and know!" exclaimed Langdon sharply. "It couldn't be; it isn't possible. Now you go, sir, and let it be your greatest disgrace that you are not fit to enter any gentleman's house."

"Oh, don't rub it in too hard, senator. You may need my help some day, but you'll have to deliver the goods beforehand."

"I said, 'Go!'"

"I'm goin', but here's a tip. Don't blame me for fightin' you. I've got to fight to live. I'm a human bein', an' humans are pretty much the same all over the world, all except you—you're only half natural. The rest of you is reformer."

After Sanders' departure the colonel sat at his table, his head resting in his hand, the events of the day crowding his brain bewilderingly.

"The battles of peace are worse than any Beauregard ever led me into," he murmured. "Fighting to conquer oneself is harder than turning the left flank of the Eighth Illinois in an enfilading fire."

But the new senator from Mississippi did not know that for him the wars of peace had only just begun, that perhaps his own flesh and blood and that of the wife and mother who had gone before would turn traitor to his colors in the very thickest of the fray.

CHAPTER II.

THE WARS OF PEACE.

"BIG BILL" LANGDON was the term by which the new senator from Mississippi had been affectionately known to his intimates for years. He carried his 230 pounds with ease, bespeaking great muscular power in spite of his gray hairs. His rugged courage, unswerving honesty and ready belief in his friends won him a loyal following, some of whom frequently repeated what was known as "Bill Langdon's Golden Rule:"

"There never was a man yet who didn't have some good in him, but

in Washington, had come to the International to interview the new senator, to describe for his paper what kind of a citizen Langdon was. He glanced around at the dingy woodwork, the worn cushions, the nicked and uneven tiles of the hotel lobby, and smiled at the clerk. "Well, if this is the new senator's idea of princely luxury he will fit right into the senatorial atmosphere." Both laughed derisively. "By the way," added Haines, "I suppose you'll raise your rates now that you've got a senator here."

The clerk brought his fist down on the register with a thud.

"Well, can't you see what you're doing?"

"We could have them every day if we wanted them. This fellow, though, we'll have all winter, I guess. His son's here now. Been breaking all records for drinking. Congressman Norton of Mississippi has been down here with him a few times. There young Langdon is now."

Haines turned quickly, just in time to bump into a tall, slender young man, who was walking unevenly in the direction of the cafe.

"Well, can't you see what you're doing?" muttered the tall young man thickly.

Haines smiled. The chap who has played halfback four years on his college eleven and held the boxing championship in his class is apt to be good natured. He does not have to take offense easily. Besides, Randolph Langdon was plainly under the influence of whisky. So Haines smiled pleasantly at the taller young man.

"Beg your pardon—my fault," Haines said.

"Well, don't let it occur again," mumbled Langdon as he strolled with uneven dignity toward the door. Bud Haines laughed.

"I guess young Langdon is going to be one of the boys, isn't he?"

"He's already one of them when it comes to a question of fluid capacity," laughed some one behind him, and Bud whirled to meet the gaze of his friend, Dick Cullen, representative of one of the big Chicago dailies.

"You down here to see Langdon, too?" commented Bud.

Cullen nodded. "Queer roost where this senator is to hang out, isn't it?"

"It can't be a rich one, then," suggested Haines.

Cullen chuckled.

"Perhaps he's an honest one."

"I hadn't thought of that. You always were original, Dickie," commented Haines dryly. "By the way, what do you know about him?"

"Nothing, except that the Evening Call printed a picture of his eldest daughter—says she's the queen daughter of the south, a famous beauty, rich planter for a father, mother left her a fortune"—

"She'll cut quite a social caper with this hotel's name on her cards, won't she!" broke in Haines as he led Cullen to a seat to await the expected legislator, whose train was late.

"I don't know very much about him myself," said Haines. "All I've been able to discover is that Stevens said the word which elected him, and that looks bad. Great glory, when I think what a senator of the right sort has a chance to do here in Washington—a nonpartisan, straight out from the shoulder man!" He paused to shake his head in disgust. "You know these fellows here in the senate don't even see their chance. Why, if you and I didn't do any more to hold our jobs than they do we'd be fired by wire the first day. They know just the old political game, that's all."

"It's a great game, though, Bud," sighed Cullen longingly, for, like many

"Big Bill" Langdon, "A Gentleman from Mississippi."

newspaper men, he had the secret feeling that he was cut out to be a great politician.

"Sure, it's a great game, as a game," agreed Haines. "So is bridge, and stud poker, and three card monte, and flimflam generally. Take this new man Langdon, for instance. Chosen by Stevens he'll probably be perfectly obedient, perfectly easy going, perfectly blind and—perfectly useless. What's wanted now is to get the work done, not play the game."

Thoroughly a cynic through his years of experience as a newspaper man, which had shown the inside workings of many important phases of the seemingly conventional life of this complex world, Cullen pretended unbounded enthusiasm.

"Hear! Hear!" he shouted. "All you earnest citizens come vote for Reformer Haines. I'm for you, Bud. What do I get in your cabinet? I've joined the reformers, too, and, like all of them, me for P-U-R-I-T-Y as long as she gives me a meal ticket."

But not even Cullen could make Haines consider his views on the necessity of political regeneration to be ridiculous. His optimism could not be snuffed out, for he was a genuine believer that the natural tendency of humankind was to do right. Wrong he believed to be the outcome of unnatural causes. This quality, combined with his practical knowledge of the world and his courage, made him a formidable man, one who would one day accomplish big things—if he got the chance.

"You know you can't shut me up, Dick," was his response to Cullen's oratorical flight. "I'm going to have my say. I don't see why a senator shouldn't be honest. All I want them to do is to play a new game. Let 'em at least seem to be honest, attend to their business, forget politics. The country sends them here to work, and if they do the work the people really don't care a hang what party they belong to."

"Come out of it, Bud. Your brain is wabbly," yawned Cullen wearily. "I'll buy a drink if you'll quiet down. Let's be comfortable till this fellow Langdon appears." He caught his friend by the arm and in spite of protest dragged him off to the cafe just as young Langdon and Congressman Norton came down through the lobby.

Though but few years older than Randolph Langdon, Charles Norton had long exercised strong influence over him because of his wider experience in the world's affairs. Like his father, young Langdon had stayed close to the plantation most of his life, particularly after leaving school, devoting his attention to studying the business of conducting the family's big estate. Norton brought him the atmosphere of the big outside world he yearned to see even as did his sister Carolina, and he imitated Norton's manners, his dress and mode of speech. The congressman's habit of confiding in Randolph, a subtle compliment, was deeply appreciated by the lad, who unconsciously became a continual advertiser of Norton's many virtues to Carolina and to his father, all of which the congressman knew.

That Norton's political career was the outcome of Carolina Langdon's ambition to shine in gay society was known to his friends as well as his family, and his desire to win her and place her where she could satisfy every whim had developed almost to a frenzy. Seeing evidences of Senator Stevens' vast influence, he did not hesitate to seek a close relationship with him, and the senator was clever enough to lead Norton to consider him his friend.

At the start of his political career Norton had higher ideas of honor than guided his actions now that he had become a part of the political machine that controlled his native state of Mississippi and of the bipartisan combination that dominated both houses of congress in the interest of the great railway and industrial corporations. Senator Stevens and other powers had so distorted Norton's view of the difference between public and private interests and their respective rights that he had come to believe capital to be the sacred heritage of the nation which must be protected at any cost. The acceptance of a retainer from the C. St. and P. Railroad company for wholly unnecessary services in Washington—only another way of buying a man—a transaction arranged by Senator Stevens, was but another stage in the disintegration of the young congressman's character, but it brought him just that much closer to the point where he could claim Carolina Langdon as his own. And opportunity does not knock twice at a man's door—unless he is at the head of the machine.

Norton, the persevering young law student who loved the girl who had been his boyhood playmate, was now Norton who coveted her father's lands, who boasted that he was on the "inside" in Washington, who was on the way to fortune—if the new senator from Mississippi would or could be forced to stand in favor of the Altacoola naval base.

His conversation with Randolph Langdon as Haines and Cullen saw them pass through the hotel lobby illustrated the nature of the Norton of the present and his interest in the Altacoola scheme.

"There's no reason why you shouldn't come in on the ground floor in this proposition, Randolph," he was urging in continuance of the conversation begun over a table in the cafe. "No reason why you shouldn't do it, my boy. Why, are you still a child, or are you really a man? You have now drafts for $50,000, haven't you?"

"Yeah," agreed Langdon, chagrined at Norton's insinuation of youthfulness and anxious to prove that he was really a man of affairs, "I've got the fifty thousand, Charlie, but—but, you see, that's the money for improvements on the plantation. As father has put me in as manager I want to make a showing."

"You can't make it until spring," urged Norton. "The money's got to lie in the bank all winter. Now, why don't you make a hundred thousand with it instead of letting it lie idle? Isn't that simple?"

The younger man's eyes opened wide, and his imagination, stimulated by the special brand of Bourbon whisky Norton had ordered for him, took rapid bounds.

"One hundred thousand! You mean I could make a hundred thousand with my fifty between now and spring?"

"Sure as a nigger likes gin," replied Norton confidently.

"How?" asked Langdon.

The young congressman leaned over confidentially.

"This is under your hat, Randolph. You can keep quiet?"

Langdon nodded eagerly.

"Then put it into Altacoola land."

"The naval base?" gasped Langdon.

Norton nodded.

"Now you've hit it. The government will select Altacoola for a naval base. Then land will jump way up to never

"Make a hundred thousand with it."

CHAPTER III.

HOW TO PLEASE A SENATOR.

THE International hotel in Washington was all hustle and bustle. Was it not preparing for its first senator since 1885? No less a personage than the Hon. William H. Langdon of Mississippi, said to be a warm personal friend of Senator Stevens, one of the leading members of his party at the capital, had engaged a suit of rooms for himself and two daughters.

"Ain't it the limit?" remarked the chief clerk to Bud Haines, correspondent of the New York Star. "The senator wrote us that he was coming here because his old friend, the late Senator Moseley, said back in '75 that this was the best hotel in Washington and where all the prominent men ought to stay."

Haines, the ablest political reporter